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Prepare for a Safe and Fun 4th of July Holiday

Family picnics, boating, swimming and enjoying the great Idaho outdoors are all part of July 4th celebrations. With a forecast for a record number of travelers hitting the road this weekend, here are a few tips to help make your travels and adventures more enjoyable and rewarding.

Water safety—We often see an increase in diarrheal illnesses in the summer that may be associated with swimming. Here are some good tips to protect yourself and your family from that and other risks.

Swimming pools, water parks, decorative water fountains and hot tubs:

- Warn your children not to swallow or fill their mouths with pool or recreational fountain water—recreational water illnesses can spread even in properly maintained pools.
- People who have or recently had diarrhea can easily contaminate large pools or waterparks, making other people sick. Don't swim if you had diarrhea recently. Take your children on regular bathroom breaks to avoid pool accidents and never change your child's diaper at poolside.
- Decorative or interactive fountains can spread illness, especially if they are not chlorinated or filtered. Consider using swim diapers on your diapered children.
- Shower before entering the pool or spa; without your help, illness can spread even in well-maintained pools.

Idaho's rivers and lakes offer great recreational opportunities. Take a moment to consider these precautions:

- Don't dive head first in unfamiliar water. Go feet first until you know the water's depth.
- Wear an appropriate personal flotation device (PFD) when boating or tubing. Children should wear a PFD on beaches, docks and riverbanks; and
- Be aware that cold water can cause hypothermia and death in as little as 10 minutes. Avoid boating or swimming when consuming alcohol – drinking alcohol can accelerate the effects of hypothermia.
- Don't drink untreated lake or river water.

(more)

Sun Safety—

Sunburns are more than painful, they can cause skin cancer. Remember to:

- Cover up! Cover as much skin as possible with tightly-woven clothing and a hat with a 2-3 inch brim or a shade cap;
- Use a broad-spectrum sunscreen with an SPF of 15 or higher. Apply sunscreen 30 minutes before going outside, and use waterproof sunscreen if you are going swimming. Don't forget sunscreen lip balm; and
- Wear sunglasses that block UV rays and protect your eyes. Parents often remember sunscreen for their children; sunglasses also are important protection.

Mosquito and tick prevention--The bites of mosquitoes and ticks can spread viruses and disease.

Protect yourself and your family:

- Apply insect repellent approved by the EPA to exposed skin and clothing, following instructions on the product label, especially when applying to children;
- Check for ticks on clothing, body, hair, and pets after returning from tick habitat;
- If a tick bites you, use a fine tweezers or notched tick extractor to remove it as close to the skin as possible and pull upwards with a steady, even pressure. Disinfect the bite site and wash your hands with soap and water. Do not squeeze, crush, or puncture the body of the tick

Food safety—Summer heat presents special considerations for holiday picnics and potlucks. In order to avoid unpleasant episodes of 'food poisoning' that often result in stomach and diarrheal illnesses, remember to:

- Wash your hands regularly with a rich lather of soap, especially when working with raw meats such as hamburger or chicken. If you are camping and do not have access to running water, use hand wipes;
- Keep cold foods cold and hot foods hot. Make sure that you have enough ice to maintain cold foods at or below 41°F. Put leftovers on ice as soon as possible. Any foods that have been 'left out' for four hours or more should not be eaten;
- Cook foods thoroughly to 165F degrees. Use a long stem meat thermometer to check the cooking temperatures of meats. Most meat thermometers come with specific temperature guidelines for the safe cooking. The color of the meat is not always a reliable indicator of whether or not the meat is fully cooked.
- Keep raw meats separate from other foods like salads or fruits; and
- Don't drink out of streams or lakes unless water is filtered or treated first.

Most importantly, be prepared. Idaho's diverse geography and sunny climate offers endless outdoor opportunities, but accidents or unexpected events can occur at any time. Carry a first-aid kit and enough food and water for an emergency. Always let friends or relatives know your travel plans. With a little bit of planning and by taking precautions, your outdoor experiences can be treasured for a lifetime.

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(Editors: For more information or interviews please contact Tom Shanahan, 334-0668, or your District Health Department Public Information Officer.)